

**Opening Statement
by
David L. Godwin**

**Regarding the 2007 Farm Bill
presented to the
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture**

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Mr. Chairman and Honorable members of this committee, first let me say welcome to North Carolina, and thank you for allowing me to participate in today's hearing. My name is David Godwin, and I am co-owner of Godwin Produce Company in Dunn, North Carolina. Together with my Father, I am continuing the farming operation started by my Grandfather in 1946. I am probably one of the smaller farming operations represented here today, but I can assure you that none are more proud of their background and heritage than I.

Godwin Produce Company is a grower and shipper of sweet potatoes. We also grow a few other vegetable crops, but our main focus is sweet potatoes. We are not "program crop" farmers.

I am also president of the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission which represents the over four hundred growers of sweet potatoes in North Carolina. Our state is number one in sweet potato production with nearly forty thousand acres planted annually.

So, as you can guess, I have a keen interest in the upcoming Farm Bill, especially in any specialty crop provisions. I do realize however, that this Committee is not sitting on a pile of free money and just asking farmers to line up to receive their allotted hand-out. You see, I believe that any monies that you may be sitting on are mine already -- mine and the other millions of tax-payers in this great country. However, I do believe that agriculture is a

resource that cannot be wasted; in order for our country to remain viable, agriculture must be protected and, when necessary, it must be supported.

I have two major concerns, or problems, with the 2002 Farm Bill. First, I feel that specialty crops were basically left out in the cold in the previous bill. Specialty crops account for approximately one-half of the total farmgate value in this country, however only a very small portion of the Federal resources were allocated to our needs. Only forty percent of the farmers in this country receive subsidies, and ninety percent of these subsidies are for the five program crops. Now I do not want to get in a competition with these crops, because, quite frankly, I am an advocate for their programs as well. However, I do feel that it is time for specialty crops to be considered in the development of the U.S. farm policy. We have our own unique challenges that need to be addressed, especially with research and marketing.

My second major concern with the 2002 Farm Bill relates to the equitable distribution of subsidy monies. According to the U.S.D.A., sixty percent of farmers receive no subsidies – forty percent receive it all. And, in fact, ten percent of the farmers in this country receive over seventy percent of all subsidies paid. Is this fair? It is thoroughly disheartening to look up on the internet and see the same people getting the top disbursements year in and year out. And, if you take in account the same individuals that have multiple farming entities, it looks even worse.

As we look forward to a new farm bill, I hope that these issues can be addressed.

Specifically related to specialty crops, I hope more significant provisions for research and marketing can be included. Our land-grant universities, including my alma mater, North Carolina State University, are fully capable and quite willing to assist us, however money is always an issue. The Sweet Potato Commission funds limited research, however our money is not enough. Each year, our industry loses chemical labels and is unable to get new product registrations – not because a particular chemical is unsafe, but

simply because the chemical companies cannot afford research and development on products for such few planted acres. It would not help their bottom line.

We also need assistance with other research. N.C. State has been a leader for years in biotechnology, genetic research, and pharmaceutical product development. Research work is already underway, and because of this, we even look forward to producing ethanol from sweet potatoes. But we need help.

And finally, in order for our farmers to survive, we must be able to compete in the global market. In order to compete, we need equity. We need to expand our markets internationally while at the same time increasing our domestic consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Any assistance with these efforts would be most appreciated.

In closing, please let me again say thank you, Mr. Chairman for allowing me to be here today. As the FFA creed I learned in high school reminds me, "I believe in the future of agriculture, with a faith born not of words but of deeds." I hope that some of my ideas and opinions today can become deeds, or provisions, in any new U.S. farm bill. Thank you.